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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN'S LOCAL ELECTIONS, U.S. PRESIDENT
OBAMA'S ADDRESS ON AFGHANISTAN

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language and English-language dailies from December 5 through 7 gave significant straightforward news reporting and editorial coverage to the city mayors' and county magistrates' elections around the island on December 5. In the elections, the KMT won 12 of 17 mayor and magistrate positions, the DPP won 4, and one went to a former KMT and now independent candidate. Local academics and political commentators, however, generally believe that the DPP has scored a victory in the elections, as the KMT's share of the vote fell steeply, from about 60 percent in last year's presidential election to 47.88 percent, while the DPP's share grew from 41.55 percent to 45.32. The pro-independence "Liberty Times" ran a banner headline on its front page on Sunday, reading "[Taiwan] People Teaching Ma Ying-jeou a Lesson." Several opinion surveys also indicated that President Ma Ying-jeou's approval rating has dropped slightly while that of DPP Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen has risen significantly.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" discussed the December 5 local election results and said now it may still be too early to tell what the impact of the local elections on the 2012 presidential election will be, but the results have surely created new variables for the future direction of cross-Straits relations. An op-ed in the KMT-leaning "China Times" also said Ma Ying-jeou's crisis has just begun. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" chimed in by saying that Saturday's election results were a warning for the Ma administration. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" said the results sent a "ringing message" to the KMT, to Chinese President Hu Jintao, and to U.S. President Barack Obama. With regard to President Obama's December 1 address on Afghanistan, an editorial in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said Obama's plan to send more troops to Afghanistan was an "exit strategy" for U.S. forces. End summary.

¶3. Taiwan's Local Elections

A) "Ma Ying-jeou's Heavy Face"

Columnist Antonio Chiang wrote in his column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 530,000] (12/7):

"... It appears that teaching Ma Ying-jeou a lesson has nearly become a consensus among all the Taiwan people [this time]. The DPP just scored a minor victory, yet it was a big setback for the KMT, because the results reflected the support or opposition of the [Taiwan] public. The number of elected DPP city and county councilors and township heads has [reached] a new high, [showing that] the party has stepped out of the shadow cast by [former President] Chen Shui-bian's legal cases and is moving ahead steadily.

"The DPP is on the rise, while the KMT is declining. Now it may still be too early to discuss the impact [of such a development] on the 2012 [presidential election], but it has created new variables

for the future direction of cross-Strait [relations]. Ma's momentum is weakening, and Beijing will surely want to give him a hand, but if it does, it will certainly be more hindrance than help. Ma's foundation of power is unstable, and [as a result,] he will have fewer bargaining chips in talking [with Beijing], and the chances are that he will make more concessions to China, generating more obstruction for himself from the opposition party. The unstable political situation in Taiwan will certainly have repercussions on Beijing's policy toward Taiwan. How Taiwan welcomes [China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait Chairman] Chen Yunlin, who is scheduled to visit Taiwan in mid-December, will be a test [of that]."

B) "Ma Ying-jeou's Crisis Has Just Begun"

Former DPP Legislator Julian Kuo opined in the KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 120,000] (12/7):

"Judging from the seats or votes it has garnered [in last Saturday's local elections], it may be a minor setback for the KMT. But if one looks into the election [results], [one can say that] it was an unprecedented downfall for Ma Ying-jeou. ... During the election campaign, the KMT experienced great difficulties in the cities and counties that are known for their agricultural development or traditional industries. Such a development has reflected the local people's deep concerns that [signing] the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) [with China] will result in more people losing their jobs and have an impact on local industries. ...

"A look at the DPP showed that the votes it has garnered [this time] has returned it to its basic 45 percent and that it has successfully got rid of the burdens created by the legal cases of [former President] Chen Shui-bian. Since it has scored a victory in the OBAMA'S ADDRESS ON AFGHANISTAN

agricultural cities and counties and those emphasizing traditional industries, the DPP will surely appeal to a stronger power island-wide to strike back in the face of [China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait Chairman] Chen Yunlin's second visit to Taiwan and the ECFA talks scheduled for the first quarter in 2010. ... A more severe prospect is that having regained its confidence, the DPP will pursue and attack [the KMT] by amplifying its criticism against the Ma administration for the latter's tilting toward China and only paying attention to the interests of the Taiwan businesses in China. ..."

C) "Where the Buck Stops"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (12/7):

"... On Saturday it was Taiwan's turn to hold local elections. Although the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) won the top posts in 12 out of 17 cities and counties, losing only Yilan and Hualien counties among those seats it had held, public opinion sees the results as a defeat for the KMT and blames President Ma Ying-jeou, the KMT chairman, for the losses. ... The KMT lost control of two counties, but only one went to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). More significantly, the KMT's share of the vote fell steeply, from about 60 percent in last year's presidential election to 47.88 percent, while the DPP's share grew from 41.55 percent to 45.32. While Ma's aura is fading, the DPP is beginning to recover from the corruption charges against former president Chen Shui-bian. ...

"Ma was perfectly right in saying voters had been magnanimous -- how else could one explain their rewarding government inability and dictatorial policymaking by handing the KMT 12 county commissioner and mayoral seats? Yet Saturday's results were a warning. If the government doesn't pay heed to the public's concerns about US beef, the economic cooperation and framework agreement with China, recognition of Chinese academic credentials, poor government performance and anger over vote-buying, then Ma and the KMT will pay a heavy price in next year's special municipality and legislative elections."

D) "Taiwan People's Message to Ma, Hu and Obama"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation:

20,000] editorialized (12/7):

"The opposition Democratic Progressive Party's strong performance in Saturday's 'three-in-one' local elections sent a ringing message to President Ma Ying-jeou's right-wing Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) government, to the rulers of the People's Republic of China and to United States President Barack Obama. The content of the message can be quite simply expressed in the famous slogan of the 'snake flag' of the American Revolution of 1776, namely 'Don't Tread On Us!' ... Besides fatally puncturing the myth of Ma's 'Teflon'-like charisma, the results constituted a clear vote of 'no confidence' in his KMT government's craven unilateral tilt toward the Chinese Communist Party-ruled PRC and the content of the KMT-CCP 'reconciliation.'

"Notably, the crushing defeats suffered by KMT candidates in the agricultural three DPP-governed southern counties and the sharp jump in DPP support in highly-industrial Taoyuan County reflected the deep anxiety among Taiwan farmers, workers and small entrepreneurs over the blind rush by the Ma administration to sign the so-called 'Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement' with Beijing under the misguided notion that even deeper integration with the high-risk PRC market is the panacea for the Taiwan economy. Most voters in these districts sent Ma a stiff warning by endorsing a stronger DPP to balance the incompetence of his KMT administration in the wake of rising unemployment rates and plunging wages, its clumsy and callous response to natural disasters such as the August 8 floods in the wake of Typhoon Morakot and its surrender of Taiwan's health security by agreeing to fully liberalize imports of risky beef products and 'offals' from the United States in secret talks with Washington. Ma now faces a grave dilemma over whether to persist in his unilateral and 'black-box' China-centric cross-strait policy after his administration has suffered such a major blow to its legitimacy. ...

"Saturday's elections also sent a warning to PRC State Chairman and CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao that as well-timed given the upcoming visit by Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait Chairman Chen Yin-lin to Taichung next week for a fourth official meeting with Taipei's Strait Exchange Foundation Chairman Chiang Ping-kun, who is also a KMT vice chairman. ... In the face of the high-profile propaganda campaign for ECFA and claims by Ma that up to 70 percent of the Taiwan people supported the deal, the KMT's clear defeat showed Beijing that nearly half of the electorates have deep doubts over Ma's arbitrary rush to forge this agreement with

the PRC without public support, transparency or democratic accountability.

"Last but not least, Saturday's election sent a clear message to the Obama administration that Washington cannot ignore the fundamental democratic rights of the 23 million Taiwan people or downplay Taiwan's national interests during its 'engagement' of the authoritarian PRC regime. This message is most timely in the wake of last month's dangerous decision by the U.S. to openly express 'respect' for the PRC's insistence on its 'sovereignty and territorial integrity,' which Beijing immediately spun into Washington's affirmation of Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan, and open encouragement of 'economic and political interaction' across the Taiwan Strait in the Joint Statement signed by Obama and Hu. Obama's Democratic administration should not turn a blind eye to this demonstration by the Taiwan people of their resolve to exercise their democratic rights and determine the shape and direction of their own society. Hence, we urge President Obama to incorporate the principle of respect for the assent of the Taiwan people on Taiwan's future relationship with the PRC in any future statements or meetings with either Hu's CCP regime or Ma's KMT government."

14. President Obama's Address on Afghanistan

"It Is All about the 'Exit Strategies'"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (12/5):

"Newspapers around the world are recently populated with all sorts of stories on exit strategies. In America, the U.S. President Barack Obama announced to deploy 30,000 extra troops to Afghanistan

over the next six months in what is sometimes referred to as 'the most difficult decision in Obama's presidency.' As the U.S. and Nato keep on fighting an interesting unpopular and seemingly un-winnable war alongside Afghan President Hamid Karzai, whose administration was graded as the second-worst corrupted government in the world by non-governmental Organization Transparency International, the mainstream narrative on the Afghan War has shifted from 'Fighting the Good War' during the 2008 Presidential Election to the search for an exit strategy for the U.S. forces.

"Obama hopes that by reinforcing the U.S. presence in the region, the allied forces can make a difference within 18 months and will, according to a senior official, 'degrade' the Taliban, and thereby make possible the ultimate goal of pulling all U.S. troops out of the country within eight years. From the cautious rhetoric by the Obama administration, it is difficult to remember the same president had reassured the U.S. soldiers that the Afghan war is 'a war of necessity,' compared to the second Iraq War as 'war of choice.' ..."

STANTON